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**Villa Del Monte:  
A Historical Review**

**1850-1976**

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The adjacent mountains were wild and rugged, the canyons deep and dark with the shadows of the forest. Coyotes broke the stillness with their dismal howls, and herds of deer slaked their thirst in the clear waters of Soquel Creek. Grizzly bears were numerous, prowling about in herds like hogs on a farm . . . to this unknown land came the intrepid homesteaders of the 1850's. . . .

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Santa Clara's southern county line and Santa Cruz's northern county line meet along the summit of the Santa Cruz mountains, amid towering pines and rugged terrain. Here--weaving and zig-zagging, sometimes in one county and sometimes in the other--is the northern boundary of the Soquel Augmentation Ranchos, an old Spanish/Mexican land grant.<sup>1</sup>

Along this boundary located south of the Summit Road, between the present Old Santa Cruz Highway and Morrell Cutoff is a 365 acre parcel of land, almost square, now known as the Villa Del Monte Housing Development.<sup>2</sup> In the lower western third of the property, standing out against the modern design of surrounding houses, is an old psuedo-Mediterranean house known locally as the "Villa", more formally called, "The Old Villa Del Monte". Standing obviously as a monument to a bygone era--with a bowling alley in its cellar, frescoes in its courtyard, a reflection pool in the garden--and the new residential area around it becoming its namesake, the house and the property it once claimed are of notable historical interest. The study of the county records and survey maps, and interviews with people who knew and lived on the property during the early 1900s have revealed many interesting facts and legends.

During the time when the territory we know as California was still under Mexican rule Dona Martina de Castro, great-granddaughter of one Joaquin Castro, was essentially the plot's first owner. Arriving in California in 1833, a widow of the De Cota family, she applied for a

land grant she called "Shoquel"--a phonetic variant of the Indian word "Osocales" (Oh-son-can-lays), meaning a place where willows abound--consisting of 1,668 acres. This she was granted in 1834 by Governor Jose Figueroe.<sup>3</sup>

Later after her second marriage to a gentleman named Michael Lodge--a Dublin sailor who had been shipwrecked on the Monterey coast in 1822 and was a successful pack-train operator able to "spot" marketable lumber<sup>4</sup>--she found 1,668 acres confining and applied for a second grant called Palo de Vesca (Tinder Trees), adjacent to Soquel on the north. This she received, but as Soquel Augmentation. Of the two Soquel grants, only Soquel Augmentation, patented by the United States in 1860 touched the Santa Clara county line. A long thin strip of it overlapped the Santa Clara/Santa Cruz county line near Burrell, in the vicinity of the plot. At its widest point, the land granted extended northward to Loma Prieta.<sup>5</sup>

All went well for Martina, who made her home by the southern border of her property and raised eight children and generally lived a ranch style life, until the death of her second husband in 1849. Bandits killed him on his way home from Monterey with a "small" fortune he had made operating a mule train into the mining area. Following his death, Martina divided her property into nine equal parts, one for each of her eight children, and one for herself.<sup>6</sup>

In 1853 she sold her remaining interest in the Ranchos for a dowery for her impending marriage to Louis Depauz, her

downfall! After sailing with him for the Hawaiian Islands she discovered he was a deserter from the French Foreign Legion. Upon arriving in Hawaii he was immediately arrested and deported back to France. Martina was left destitute. She returned to Santa Cruz and spent her remaining days with one of her daughters, Maria Guadalupe Averno.<sup>7</sup> She died in 1890.<sup>8</sup>

In the meantime, with California becoming a part of the Union, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo being signed in 1848--providing that all grants made by the Spanish and Mexican governments to their subjects in California would be confirmed to the grantees or their successors by the United States, upon the showing of deeds--the land she had settled on her children, and its ownership, had become a matter of dispute. Typical of "old" Spanish/Californian families, neither Martina nor her heirs had taken seriously the value of their land holdings. Boundaries had not been clearly marked, and surveys which were often taken by untrained surveyors on horseback, contradicted the state's land ownership records. Homesteaders and settlers had made their homes along the summit ridge, and claimed land along the Santa Cruz/Santa Clara County boundary. The result: Land disputes between Martina's heirs, the homesteaders and settlers.<sup>9</sup>

So typical and prolific were land disputes after California's entry into the Union that the U.S. Land Act of 1857 authorized special land commissions to resolve such disputes. One such representative commission--with Thomas

W. Wright, John W. Turney and Goderfry B. Bockins acting as referees--settled the Soquel dispute. Under the final partition, 26 people received portions of the land grant. Among them were Lyman J. Burrell who received 1/27 of the grant, and Fredrick A. Hihn who received 12/19.<sup>10</sup>

These two gentlemen are of significance regarding the 365 acre plot of land. Prior to the commission's decision these were the homesteaders claiming the plot as a part of their "territory." After the commission's partitioning of the Augmentation in 1863, Burrell was granted lands south of the plot and Hihn was granted lands inclusive of the plot's acreage. Burrell, however, was indeed one of the original homesteaders; he claimed the plot as a part of his territory and impacted his mark on it and surrounding countryside.<sup>11</sup>

Born in 1809 in Massachusetts, Burrell was one of the first settlers along the summit ridge. Having left his Ohio farm in 1848, he arrived in Santa Clara county, farmed for four years for a gentleman named Cary Peeble and then left the valley with his wife and friends for the Santa Cruz mountains.<sup>12</sup> The journal of one of the neighboring farmers recorded:

They were four days moving their family by wagon twenty miles from Santa Clara to their mountain home. They camped at Forbes Mill in Los Gatos the first night, took an early start over Jones Hill next morning for Moody Gulch, the third night they camped at Patchen, and arrived the [fourth] day at their mountain home having suffered great hardships, climbing over rocky hills and through the forests.<sup>13</sup>

Later, Clarissa, Burrell's wife, wrote of that hard journey as "Mementoes of Our Heavenly Father's Love" and called the

flowers "those sweet smiles of Our Heavenly Father".<sup>14</sup>

Here in the mountains Burrell homesteaded 3,000 acres of land, building a four-walled, roofless cabin, planting pear orchards, and raising goats, swine and long-horned steer--eventually giving up the former after his stock had been attacked too many times by bears and cougar. It was six years before he discovered his land was not government property.<sup>15</sup>

The loss of the plot, laying to the far north of his originally claimed property, and representing only a minor fraction of the acreage, compared to the 3,500 acres the commission had granted him, was minimal. Life for Lyman J. Burrell continued much the same as usual.

However, Burrell--a man of intellect, ingenuity and practicality--was a builder. He made an impact in the mountains, along the summit ridge, before and after the augmentation partition. In 1856, while still "owning" the plot, he introduced into the mountains a new form of farming, an action from which eventually a proliferation of fruit trees and vines along the summit was to evolve.<sup>16</sup>

In 1859 after the partition, after having travelled for seven years to and from Santa Cruz to collect his mail each week and noting the entrenched path he and his mule train's had trodden, he recognized the value and usefulness of a wide trail along the summit ridge, over the mountains to Santa Cruz. This he built.<sup>17</sup> In 1862 this trail was incorporated into the San Jose Turnpike Company, and used by

the Coveley Stagecoach Line as a route across the mountains from Los Gatos to Santa Cruz. They charged \$2.50 a trip. Later in 1878 the State of California declared the trail, by then a road--a public highway. This trail now lies as the foundation of a paved road known as Summit Road.<sup>18</sup>

Burrell's final noteworthy contribution to the mountains was the founding of a community named after him. Burrell, consisting of only a general store, blacksmith's shop, telephone exchange and later a school, run by Burrell's wife, was somewhat insignificant and only enjoyed a brief existence during the late 1890s and through the early part of the twentieth century. The telephone exchange; however, gave it importance beyond its size.<sup>19</sup>

The Santa Cruz Mountain Telephone Company had located their central mountain office there, providing an invaluable service to forest bound subscribers and giving them often their only means of contact with "the rest of the world" in times of emergency: sickness, accidents, childbirth, and the ever present menace of fire. In 1934, long after Burrell had ceased to exist, there were still 86 subscribers dependent on this exchange. It finally closed in 1949.<sup>20</sup>

Burrell continued to live in the mountains until his death in 1884,<sup>21</sup> selling off his land piece-meal right up until his death. When he was left with only 1,000 acres he sold one portion to his daughter Martha for fifty dollars; another portion to his son, J.J. Burrell, for one thousand dollars; and by deed of gift, conveyed to his daughter Clarissa (Clara) 60 acres on Burrell Creek adjoining the



plot's acreage.<sup>22</sup>

His wife died in 1857, leaving him with three children: James Burney, Martha and Clarrisa, who later became the wife of the plot's next door owner, Hiran L. Morrell. Burrell married again in 1864, this time to Mrs. L. Lewis, who died in 1875<sup>23</sup>; and a third time in 1876 to a Mrs. Filomena Vining.<sup>24</sup>

After Hihn became the plot's "legal" owner by the augmentation partition in 1860, little regarding its natural state changed. Among Hihn's many thousands of acres, it was a somewhat insignificant plot.

Born in Germany in 1829, Hihn landed in Santa Cruz county in 1851 with a pack on his back. In his pack were all his worldly possessions, plus trinkets to sell as a roaming peddler. According to folklore Hihn then set up business in a "crude" store constructed of packing boxes. "Between tending store, and making long trading forays into the mountains, he was a busy man."<sup>25</sup> How he managed to acquire an enormous fortune in real estate, including thousands of acres of prime redwood timber, is still one of the age-long questions of the county. Among his many holdings was a mill site at Laurel, located just south of the plot, where he formed the Hihn Company in 1892 with his sons Louis and Fred and son-in-law W.T. Cope.<sup>26</sup>

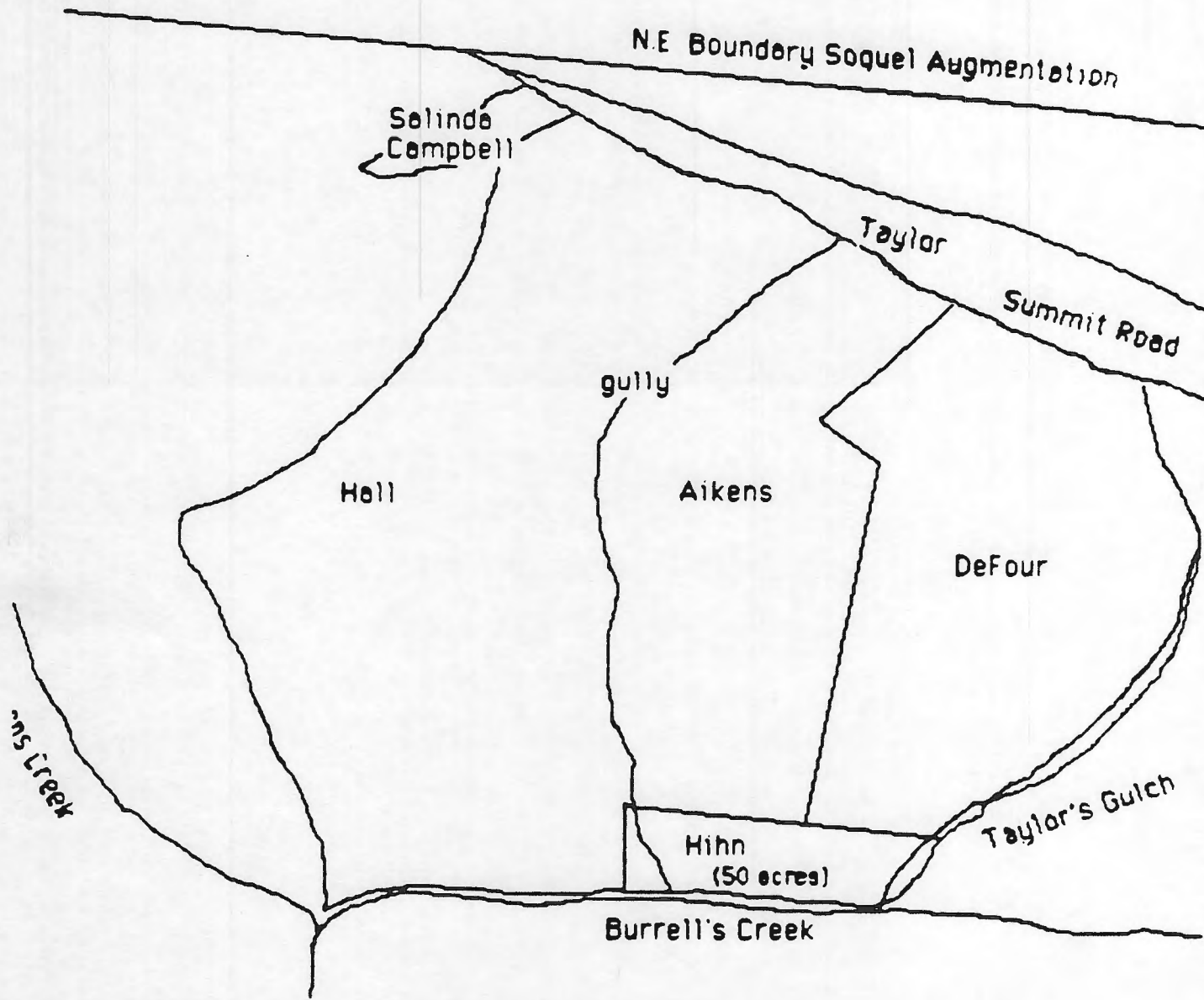
Hotels, railways, concessions, forests, mills, manufacturing plants and shipping lines--there was little regarding business in Santa Cruz county in which the Hihn

Company did not have an active interest during the late nineteenth century. One Santa Cruz County history credits Hihn with the founding of the city of Capitola, and another the founding of two banks.<sup>27</sup>

The plot must have seemed somewhat insignificant to Hihn, except possibly monetarily. In 1873 he sold 126 acres to a gentleman named Hall,<sup>28</sup> in 1875 and 1876 fifty acre parcels to J.W. DeFour,<sup>29</sup> in 1883 a forty foot strip across the plot to the South Pacific Railway (S.P.R.),<sup>30</sup> in 1877 four acres to a woman named Salinda Cambell,<sup>31</sup> in 1880 and 1881 fifty acre parcels to Charles Aiken,<sup>32</sup> and between 1880-1890 acreage to William J. Taylor.<sup>33</sup>

Little is known about Hall or DeFour other than the locations of their "Hihn" property (refer to Map I), and that Hall was one of the friends that accompanied Burrell to the mountains;<sup>34</sup> however, there seems to be connection between Hihn selling property to DeFour in 1876 and the selling of property to Aiken in 1881. In 1876 while selling to DeFour, Hihn apparently made a deal with a gentleman named Storey that eventually obliged him to sell the land to Aiken in 1881. What the "deal" was is unknown; one can only presume it was a business transaction.<sup>35</sup> The selling of land to the S.P.R. was in preparation for expanding the railway through the mountains; from a narrow gauge to a standard gauge railroad, after the S.P.R. had bought it from the South Pacific Coast Railway--something in which Hihn was already investing.<sup>36</sup>

Charles A. Aiken, and/or his heirs after buying the



**Map 1**

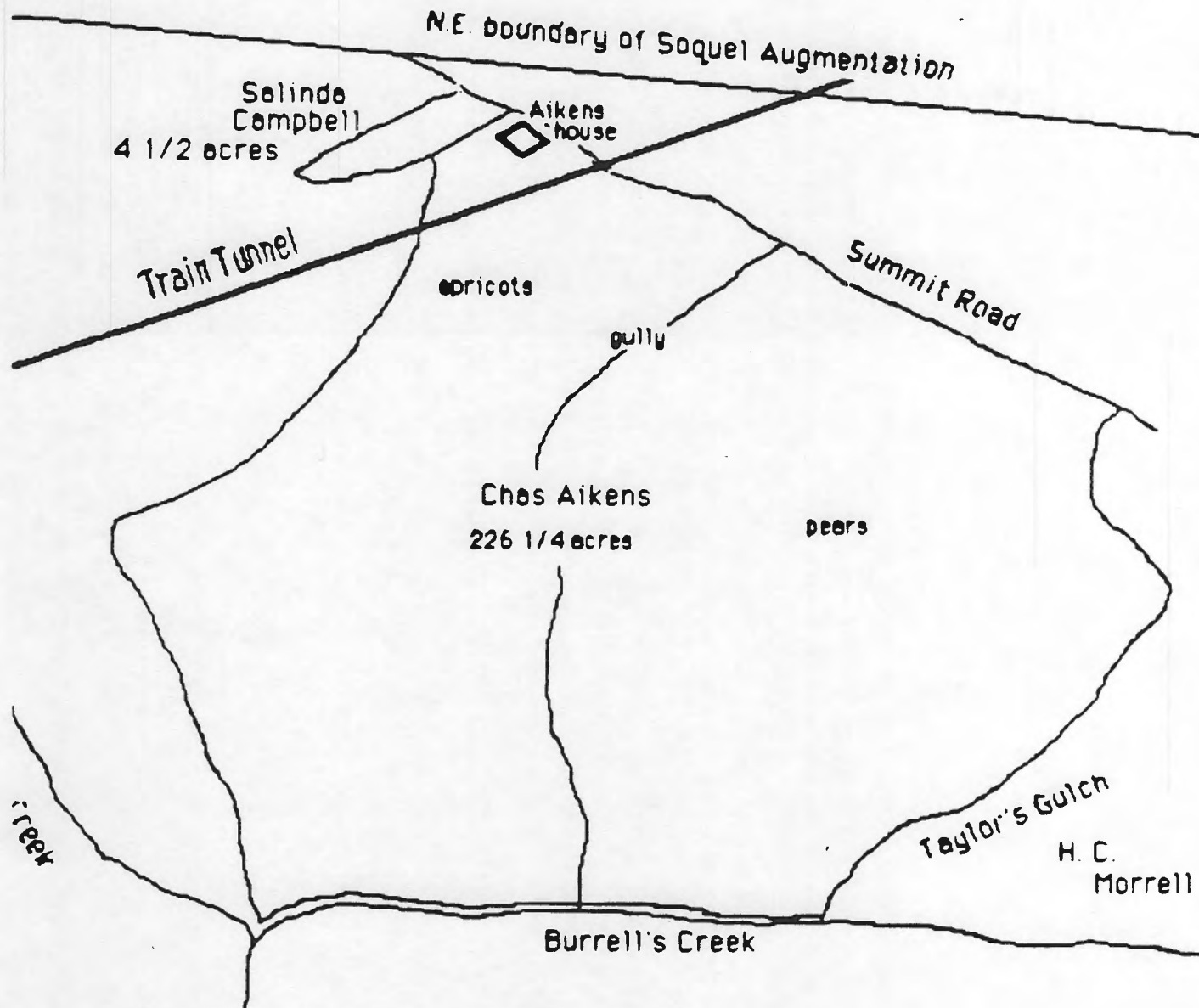
**Anonymous undated maps. Special Collection Room.  
University of California at Santa Cruz**

initial 50 acre parcels of land from Hihn in 1880 and 1881, went on to eventually purchase from Hall and DeFour all the property Hihn had sold them,<sup>37</sup> and in 1904 to purchase from Hihn another 50 acres of land along the southern border of his [Aiken's] property.<sup>38</sup> Of his total acreage Aiken used 226 acres. Most of the northwest section and part of the south of his land were too steep and rugged for use. Additionally along the northwest section was the property sold by Hihn to the S.P.R.; of this property Aiken used only the upper northwest corner, bordering on Salinda Cambell's parcel<sup>39</sup> (refer to Map I).

Aiken was the first to own the plot as a parcel of land without it being joined to other property by ownership. He bought it to retire to; as one report reads, "He longed for the peace and quiet of the country. As a lad he'd grown up with the feel of soil between his fingers."<sup>40</sup> The first few months may have been, as he expected, quiet and peaceful. He and his wife built a wood-framed house along the plot's northern perimeter--where the white gates on the plot now stand--raised a few chickens, and cleared the land of brush for planting crops. He even joined a neighborhood orchestra at the Summit Opera House, which was built by Aiken's neighbors: Schulthies, Averil and Chase.<sup>41</sup>

His life in the mountains; however, was not destined to remain quiet or simple. Two major events, the peaking of dry farming along the summit ridge, and the increased use of the railroad through the mountains, were to bring noise and

Highland Map  
1880-81



Map 2

Special Collection Room  
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"havoc" into his world. The dry farming method Burrell had introduced into the mountains, during the mid 1850's, suddenly "took off" during the early 1880's. The drying sheds of Los Gatos and Santa Cruz, having discovered the preference of dried fruit consumers for "sweet" mountain couldn't buy enough. All the way along the summit, apple, pear, apricot and prune trees lined the hillsides. Drying sheds were innundated with a proliferation of fruit, handling as many as 70,000 pounds a season, or drying as many as 4,000 trays of fruit at one time, yet still demanding more.<sup>42</sup> In 1881 canneries, providing an even faster way to get the fruit to the market, started "cashing in" on the potential profits. Hillside property values soared from \$20-30 an acre to \$300-400 an acre,<sup>43</sup> and life in the mountains became a bevy of activity. The sound of horses and carts passing up and down Summit Road, on their way or returning from the Los Gatos/Santa Cruz markets or drying sheds, became an all too familiar sound to Aiken.<sup>44</sup>

The arrival of the Southern Pacific Coast Railway in May of 1880 through the mountains added to the noise and activity. Now farmers, orchardists, lumberjacks, and stock-raisers all had an easier way to transport their goods. Horse and wagons now came from all over the mountains to freight their timber, livestock and produce. Traffic along the Summit increased. "It sometimes seemed like everyone in the mountains was headed for Wright's Station at the same time. Once there some would spend all day gossiping, selling, even picnicking. Wright's Station was the place to

be in those days."<sup>45</sup>

Aiken, though originally seeking peace and quiet, joined the fun (if farming can be called fun). Higher profits were realized by processing one's own fruit and shipping it directly to the San Francisco Commission yards. Aiken, by all reports, preferred this method of dry farming:

After picking the fruit, first we'd pit and slice apricots in two, apples in slices, and pears in quarters, then dip them in lye, to break their skins and make them quicken faster, and then we'd lay them in a single layer on drying trays. There they were left in the sun to dry. If it were 90 degrees or more it wouldn't take them long to dry, two days for apples, three days for apricots. Raising the fruit was fine, though not without problems, but the drying wasn't necessarily easy or without problems. If there were a storm in the middle of the night, you had to get up and move those trays. Once I got up in a storm and moved 40 trays--caught the death of cold, I did. And you wouldn't just leave that fruit to sit, those apricot and apple slices had to be sorted, some weren't sweet enough and would rot; if they weren't removed they'd rot the whole tray. After the fruit was dry we'd pile it in a heap in the barn, then either go to town and sell it, or send it up to a commission house in San Francisco. Sometimes buyers would come up here. Usually for a good price we'd go to them. After we'd sold it we'd load it into 100 pound sacks and haul it by horse and wagon down the mountains. After the railway opened we'd haul it over to Wright's. There was an eight o'clock train, half-past ten train and two, six, and seven o'clock trains, all of them express. The number 13 engine used to come through here.<sup>46</sup>

The railway! Yes, it changed Akin's environment. Not only did it bring more traffic to the road along the northern boundary of his property and enable him to transport his own produce faster, but the very laying of railway-lines underneath--not over--his property, eventually changed its character.

While laying railway tracks, in order to get over the mountains the S.P.C.R. had needed to tunnel. After tunnelling under Aiken's--then Hall's-- northern border, they'd utilized the forty foot strip of land Hihn had sold them that went right through the property, and tunnelled at a left angle across the plot's northern perimeter.<sup>47</sup>

This alone didn't bother Aiken; he'd known of the tunnel's existence when he'd purchased the property; however, the tunnel, a mile and an eighth long, had become notorious during its construction for being accident prone. Explosions and accidents had been catastrophic. One explosion, caused by torches and the abundance of natural gas in the tunnel, had killed 200 people, another 60, and another 75. The list goes on to include accidents from cave-ins and falling rocks. In one year there were over 500 injuries or deaths.<sup>48</sup> It was the notoriety of the tunnel caused by these accidents that affected Aiken's life.

After two years of construction, the tunnel and the railway over to Santa Cruz were completed on May 15, 1880.<sup>49</sup> When it first opened to passenger trains in the late 1880's curiosity seekers flocked to stations everywhere between San Francisco and Los Gatos just to have the opportunity to travel through what became known as Wright's Tunnel.<sup>50</sup>

One gentleman recounted the tunnel and the railway in his memoirs:

When I lived in Laurel [a tunnel town between Wright's Tunnel and the Glenwood Tunnel], as a boy I found it a great thrill to run about excitedly hunting for timbers enough a part to stand between



while that rattling train roared by leaving so much smoke that my coal-oil lantern was useless for some time. The portholes from the middle of the tunnel were mere specks admitting no light. I walked alone through the tunnel to Glenwood over a mile away for groceries. The hike over the Mt. Charley Road was a full day's trip for a boy on foot. The woods were full of bears and lions so I preferred the tunnel. I hoped a train might pass where the timbers were close together so I could brag about having to roll in the wet cold murkey trench that drained the tunnel.

The slogan says, "Next time try the train." I did. I stood out on the platform of that old time chair car to enjoy the beautiful landscapes. The jerks and twists of the train through the gorge nearly threw me off the platform, so I tried the seat inside. The brakeman rushed out to slow up the train by hand brakes. He left the stove door open and the damper shut. This filled the twisting, rolling jerky car with smoke which soon made us all seasick, but we landed safely at "Los Gatos" which was shouted three times as we were riding down the canyon.<sup>51</sup>

Later, after the Southern Pacific Railroad bought the South Pacific Coast Railroad in July 1887, day-excursions from San Francisco continued to maintain the interest in the tunnel with "See the orchards and travel through the tunnel" advertising. It was these excursions that brought dismay to Aiken and brought "havoc" into his life.<sup>52</sup> The excursionists would leave San Francisco happy and in good spirits; however, by the time they had travelled through the orchards and tunnel on their way to Santa Cruz, and were returning back through the mountains, many had over indulged in "spirits for the health", and were, if not violent, in boisterous spirit, throwing bottles, litter and refuse out of the windows, shouting, singing and asking train conductors to stop the train to let them see the tunnel, picnic and pick fruit. Many conductors complied rather than

risk antagonizing or inciting their often half-crazed passengers to anger. As a result, stopping trains in the mountains became expected, and thus they often did. Hence, uncontrollably passengers would run wild in the orchards, picking fruit, breaking tree limbs and littering with broken bottles and picnicking refuse. By the time the train pulled away from Aiken's property, half of his trees were destroyed, and by the time the train carriages arrived back in San Francisco windows were broken, seats torn-up and the conductors "nervous wrecks."<sup>53</sup>

It was the temperament and destruction of property by excursionists that angered and dismayed Aiken; however, there was little he could do about it, since the S.P.R. owned the land. He adjusted. Life in the mountains for Aiken was not going to become quieter or less distressful.

With the coming of the railroad to the mountains, and the traffic dry farming had created, road conditions improved, so thus when the automobile became popular after the turn of the century<sup>54</sup> it was not long after that excursionists and San Francisco weekenders came in even larger droves than in the trains. Santa Clara Valley and Santa Cruz became the places to visit, again because of the beauty of the orchards, mountains, and lagoons.<sup>55</sup> Traffic along the Summit Road continued, the drone of engines now instead of horses hooves and wagon-wheels, and the sound of trains and people instead of silence.

Aiken went on living in the mountains, but excursionists and the tunnel were not the only major

troubles in his life. While the excursionists and the tunnel visitors were causing him so much distress a smallpox scare occurred in the mountains. As One old pioneer recalled the episode:

The smallpox epidemic of that cold winter of 1882-83 nearly "frightened to death" every workman and lumberman. All were quarantined or under travel restriction. Everybody feared somebody else had smallpox. Yellow quarantine flags waved "Keep away" along what is now Montebello Way.

The news gradually spread that a lumberman above Lexington had found a smallpox scab of a heavy man. This "good" samaritan vaccinated as many as that one scab could serve.

In a dark, cold room of the old Lynden Hotel, a sandy whiskered man sterilized a sharp blade of his picket knife by the blaze of a coal oil lamp. He scratched in a small lump of that black scab. "Doc" W.S. McMurty did that job for me and I went home rejoiced that smallpox could not get me. But delirium next week nearly did.<sup>56</sup>

Whether or not Aiken received a smallpox vaccine from the unknown "good samaritan" is unknown; he survived, however, and in 1906 witnessed the bizarre effects of an earthquake on his neighbors, the tunnel and his own property:

Farmer Morrel had pastured his cow for the night on the luscious grass to the northwest, and like the early worm that got caught by the early songster, "was never seen again". This 1906 quake caused a lateral displacement which moved the east side eight feet to the north, leaving a cradle momentarily eight feet wide for Morrel's cow. For forty years the Schulthies' fence told the same story of this eight feet shift in the earth.

The tunnel below the surface told the same story with a six to eight foot shaft that half closed the tunnel, and twisted the rails up and down like a rollercoaster. When a mere child . . . heard the carpenters who were putting in the reinforcing timbers telling of a mysterious "vertical drive bed" which kept tumbling down.

Those strong 10' X 14' upright timbers and trusses were difficult to install for they had to hold the tons of loose rocks and gravel along the earthquake "rift." There were also many puzzling

sights above the tunnel. The "Crazy Orchard", Aiken's orchard, had lines of trees thrown nearer and then farther apart in a haphazard way over the whole farm down by the creeks, all caused by little landslides. The gully in the middle, was strange. The rift caused many springs and earthquake lakes to dry up along the Summit community of Redwood Township, but not in Aiken's gully; it caught all the water, it swelled up in the middle and made a lagoon.<sup>57</sup>

Between 1912 and 1918 Aiken died,<sup>58</sup> leaving his property to his wife and children. On June 15, 1918 his heirs sold the property, by then known as the Partington tract after the drying shed Aiken had invested in and/or had leased property to, to a San Francisco gentleman, Clarence E. Schmitt.<sup>59</sup>

Schmitt was a San Francisco stockbroker. Like Aiken he sought a retreat from the hustle and bustle of city life. The end of the war in 1918 had brought forth a tremendous surge in industrial/technological growth, flooding the city with bustling business.<sup>60</sup> Schmitt, a successful businessman, thrived on the activity, but like many others he wanted occasionally to retreat--to escape. And country houses "were the thing to have."<sup>61</sup>

The country house Schmitt chose to build was a replica of an old Italian Villa, typical of the psuedo-Mediterranean fad of the 1920's, and was to be called Villa Del Monte (House of the Mountain). Built with hard bricks from Stockton sold in local building supply stores--instead of soft limestone bricks from local Santa Cruz kilns--concrete poured pillars, and timbers cut from the trees on the property, it was essentially to be a rectangular shaped

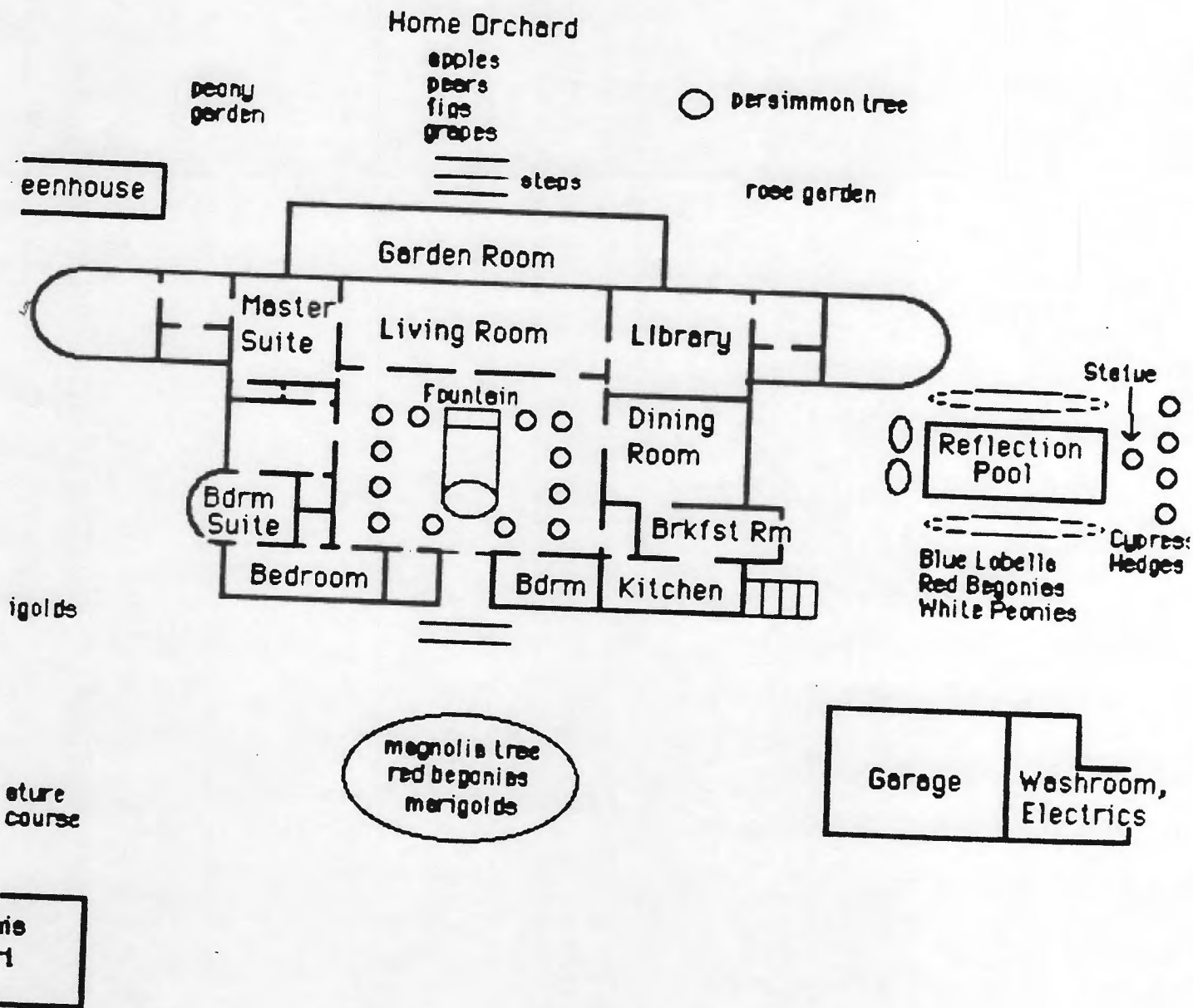
structure, with suites--in the typically Italian manner--located around a central courtyard, complete with pillars and a fountain. A builder was contracted and the house was under construction for two years.<sup>62</sup>

In all nineteen rooms were built: Two bedroom suites with their own sitting-rooms and bathrooms, three bedrooms with separate bathrooms, a dining-room, living-room, library, breakfast room, garden room, and kitchen. The living room had oak beams and panelling, imported from France by a San Francisco company; the garden room, behind the living room contained a stone oval fireplace and walls of glass, and the library, shelves and panels of the "darkest oak." Throughout the house English regency furniture filled the rooms, and dark crimson oriental and persian rugs adorned highly polished floors. In the kitchen, for practicality, was a black slate floor.<sup>63</sup>

For indoor recreation the house had a bowling alley in the basement with wooden floors, and a pit of sand at its east to hold the pins. Outside was a reflection pool for swimming, a greenhouse for growing Mr. Schmitt's favorite flowers--begonias--a tennis court, a miniature golf course and a reservoir, nine feet deep; containing over a million gallons of water, for occasional boating.<sup>64</sup>

In the courtyard, the fountain--a frog spurting water from its mouth--was surrounded by red begonias, lemon and orange trees,<sup>65</sup> and copies of Roman Catacomb frescoes in blues, yellows, reds and golds. And by the iron entry gate Italian floor tiles warned, "Cav can em" (Beware of dog),

# Villa del Monte



Map 3

Composite map from interview information

despite the fact Mr. Schmitt never owned a dog.<sup>66</sup>

The whole house was run by a variety of power sources. The stove, phonograph and lights were powered by an electricity generator located in a room behind the garage. Heat, though rarely needed during summer, and hot water were provided by oil, and the pool and a small garage washroom furnished with hot water from a solar unit located on the garage roof.<sup>67</sup>

Connecting all the rooms to each other and to the foreman's lodge at the gate was an intercom system, its main control located in the kitchen. Additionally, between the cottage and the house, and the "outside world" was a telephone line. Schmitt, like Aiken, subscribed to the Santa Cruz Central Mountain Company, the telephone line in Burrell,<sup>68</sup> until its service was replaced in 1948 by the General Telephone Company.<sup>69</sup>

Access to the house was a long, narrow, almost straight gravel road down from the Summit Road. After passing through a pair of white gates, and passing the lodge gate, one headed south, over the hill, curving to the left, just before reaching the house. The house's first exposure was through arching willows, its highlighting feature. The drive continued, looping around an island of red begonias, a magnolia tree and yellow siscus in front of the house, behind the garage and back again to behind the island in front of the house.<sup>70</sup>

All along the drive and around the house were flowers,

shrubs and orchards. Natural vegetation, siscus, and fruit trees grew along the right side of the road down from Summit, with orchards on the left. In front of the house on the island were the red begonias, siscus and the magnolia tree, to the left by the greenhouse gold marigolds; along the pool's edges, red begonias, blue lobelia, and white peonies; at its western edge stood a fountain with a background hedge of trimmed Cyprus trees, and behind the house a home orchard of apples, pears, apricots, and persimmons; Mr. Schmitt was partial to persimmons, especially with cream.<sup>71</sup>

Surrounding the house and grounds was the farm. Orchards of pears, apples, chestnuts and prunes lined the fields. Driving from Summit Road, chestnuts to the far east (out of sight), pears close to the road, and further down and behind the house, prunes, more apples and more pears<sup>72</sup> (for location refer to Map 4). Schmitt, like Aiken, created a self-supporting retreat by dry farming; however, unlike Aiken he attempted to use the full extent of his property, and even extended his property further by later purchasing four extra acres from the heirs of Salinda Cambell, the woman too whom Hihn had originally sold the land.<sup>73</sup>

Though knowledgeable about fruit marketing and farming Schmitt preferred to hire farm managers (foremen) to oversee the orchards and, in his absence, the house. The first foreman, Joe Lewis, stayed from 1920 through 1942, and the second, Robert Walters, from 1943 through 1958. Of his boss



the latter said;

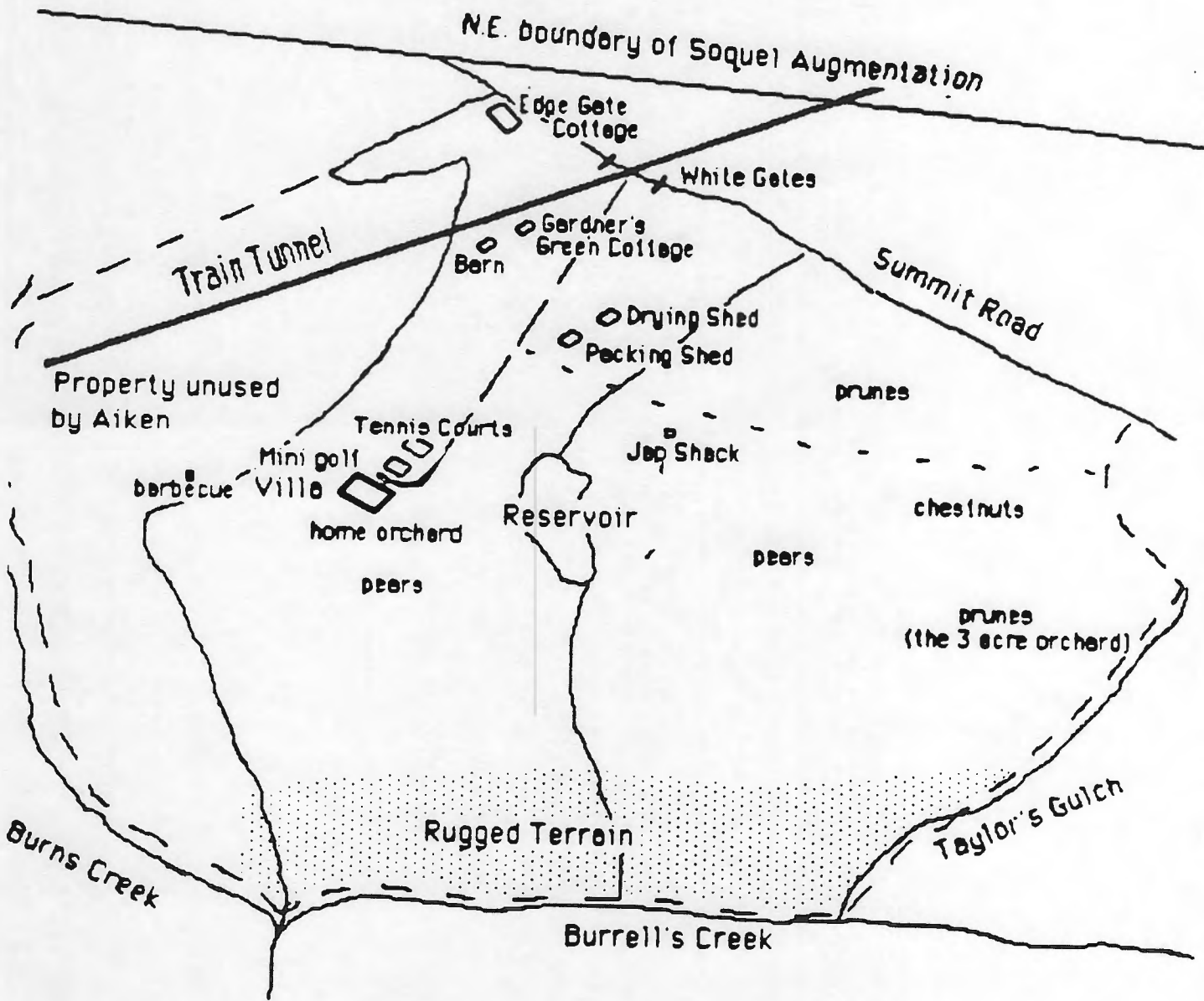
When I first went to work for him I thought I'd get \$150 a month plus a cottage; I got \$135 a month and a cottage, but he was a good boss; he took everything in his stride; \$135 a month wasn't bad; when I worked for the Kennedy's I started at \$75 a month.<sup>74</sup>

Both foremen during their respective times at the farm lived in Mr. Aiken's old house, now the Schmitt's gate house. Just a few hundred feet away from them, in a small green cottage, lived the gardener, at one time a gentleman named Grable. Leaving most of the farm management to these gentlemen, Mr. Schmitt would make his farming preferences known and retreat.<sup>75</sup>

In the beginning Schmitt, like most of the farmers along the summit, liked to dry his own fruit. The process was much like the process Aiken used, except there was probably more fruit harvested and dried. During fruit harvesting Mr. Walters would hire 8-10 laborers, often the friends of a "steady" Mexican employee. First they would harvest, shaking prunes from the trees, picking apples, pears, and chestnuts, and then they would haul the crop over to the drying sheds. These were located in the center of the western third of the plot, close to the reservoir, along with storage vats--six feet long, six feet wide and eight feet high--packing sheds, a barn and an old cabin called, "The Jap Shack"; it was never used, and no one ever knew quite how it got its name.<sup>76</sup>

Between 1945 and 1958, after it became more profitable to send fruit to drying sheds and packaging plants, Schmitt

Clarence E. Schmitt property



**Map 4**  
Composite map from  
interview information

- Creeks
- Tunnel
- Property Line
- Drive
- Farm Lane

stopped drying his own fruit, and started having it dried at a Los Gatos drying shed owned by a gentleman named Nick Suland, and selling it in bulk to a packaging plant in San Jose owned by Dan Young. Dry fruit farming was more than profitable for Schmitt; it supported itself, the retreat house and the family amicably.<sup>77</sup>

To this house and farm the Schmitt family retreated. "Mrs. Schmitt, Edith, was a tall willowy, long haired blond, who at first sight struck one as an aristocrat-- sophisticated, distant and aloof--but was a woman whose beauty and character grew on you. The more you saw her the more beautiful she appeared and the more amicable her personality."<sup>78</sup> Robert Oliver, Schmitt's stepson, was ten and a half when Schmitt bought the plot. He was to spend his childhood summers there, and eventually grow up to become a Buick salesman in Palo Alto.<sup>79</sup> And Mr. Schmitt! He was a short gentleman, of medium build, aged between 45-55 (when he bought the plot), had a gentle temperament, and a quiet disposition. "Nothing ever seemed to upset him; he'd take everything in his stride."<sup>80</sup>

During summer months they'd drive down from San Francisco in the family Buick, and usually stay until early September.<sup>81</sup> Here, in the beginning, they would relax in the gardens, swim, bowl, golf, play tennis, boat and garden. On weekends Edith loved to entertain, often cooking for friends, inviting them into the kitchen to roast beef, or to the garden to the west of the house to barbecue chicken and

fresh ears of corn (from Mr. Walter's vegetable garden). On Saturday afternoons she would often drive her friends through the orchards to Los Gatos to shop, while Mr. Schmitt stayed home and showed his friends the farm and his begonias in the greenhouse. In the evening there was the local Summit Opera House, and the theatre in Los Gatos; though the Schmitts preferred the quiet of their retreat in the mountains.<sup>82</sup>

During winter months the Schmitt family would reside in San Francisco, essentially leaving the mountain retreat to survive independent of their help. With the house closed up and the fruit trees dormant during winter, there was little for the foreman and gardener to do but general house and farm maintenance. Often during winter the cellar/bowling alley would flood or the pipes would freeze. Schmitt would be contacted and upon notification, contact the necessary repairmen. "He took care of all the household problems, bills, and employees paychecks."<sup>83</sup>

On the farm, Walters would spend winter months replacing prune, chestnut and pear trees. Between 1942 and 1957 they planted over 300 new trees, replacing the old or the diseased ones. Sometimes Mr. Schmitt would contact Mr. Walters and order fresh fruit--persimmons or fresh vegetables--to be sent to his office at 369 Pine Street, San Francisco. One winter, during the Schmitt's absence, Mr. Walter's daughter Elaine was married at the Villa, by the reflection pool, with white peonies from the garden and stereo music from the house.<sup>84</sup>

During later years with Mr. and Mrs. Schmitt in declining health, activity at the house and on the farm declined. Although Mr. Schmitt continued to swim three or four times a week--for pleasure and his varicose veins--there was less entertaining, less bowling (the wall behind the bowling alley had begun to show the impact of bowling balls, and the floors the effects of flooding), less boating, tennis and gardening. The Schmitts, now alone since their son had grown up and was living away from home, arrived at the Villa purely to enjoy each other in the peace and quiet of the mountains; Mrs. Schmitt now accepted the help of a maid with the cooking and housework.<sup>85</sup>

On the farm, activity at the Villa also declined. With large packing plants and drying sheds beginning to grow their own fruit, and cities continuing to attract the mountain population with social, educational and employment opportunities, reduced labor during harvesting, and declining profits made the plausibility of dry-farming questionable.<sup>86</sup>

Finally, in 1954-55, Mrs. Schmitt, Edith, died. Mr. Schmitt married again--while in his 60's-70's--to a woman named Louis with children, and continued occasionally to visit the Villa, he was never quite as interested in the property as he had been before Edith died. He often talked of selling it.<sup>87</sup>

In 1953 he had sold 1.32 acres of his property to a gentleman named Murrey.<sup>88</sup> After Edith's death he sold 1.46

acres to a gentleman named C.E. Howe,<sup>89</sup> deeded 4.3 acres to the County of Santa Cruz,<sup>90</sup> and in 1957 five parcels of land--his remaining acreage--to two New Jersey brothers, their father and their New Jersey corporation.

132 acres	John P. Bellush and his wife Joy
50 acres	Joseph E. Bellush and his wife Dorothy
50 acres	Joseph Bellush and his wife Mary
109 acres	Three Jays Corporation New Jersey <sup>91</sup>

The Bellush's! Two brothers were sitting in the Summit Restaurant, by the 1940's Highway 17, drinking coffee and enjoying the view of the mountains and countryside. From this event evolved the selling of the plot from Schmitt to John and Joseph Bellush. After the initial sale, Mr. Joseph P. Bellush, the brother's father, gave power of attorney to his sons, regarding the property and returned to New Jersey.<sup>92</sup> Eventually, in 1958 the brothers deeded the property from their own names and the New Jersey corporation into a California corporation they created called "Villa Del Monte."<sup>93</sup>

Within weeks of the transaction, bulldozers, road-graders and tractors appeared on the property. As Mr. Walters, who continued to work on the plot for two years after Mr. Schmitt left, said, "They came straight in here and ploughed straight through the orchards. They'd no respect for the land. The 300-400 trees we'd planted between 1942-57 were just maturing, just reaching their most productive period, and they came in here and ploughed straight through them."<sup>94</sup> The brothers object to develop the land for residential use: to make a profit.<sup>95</sup>

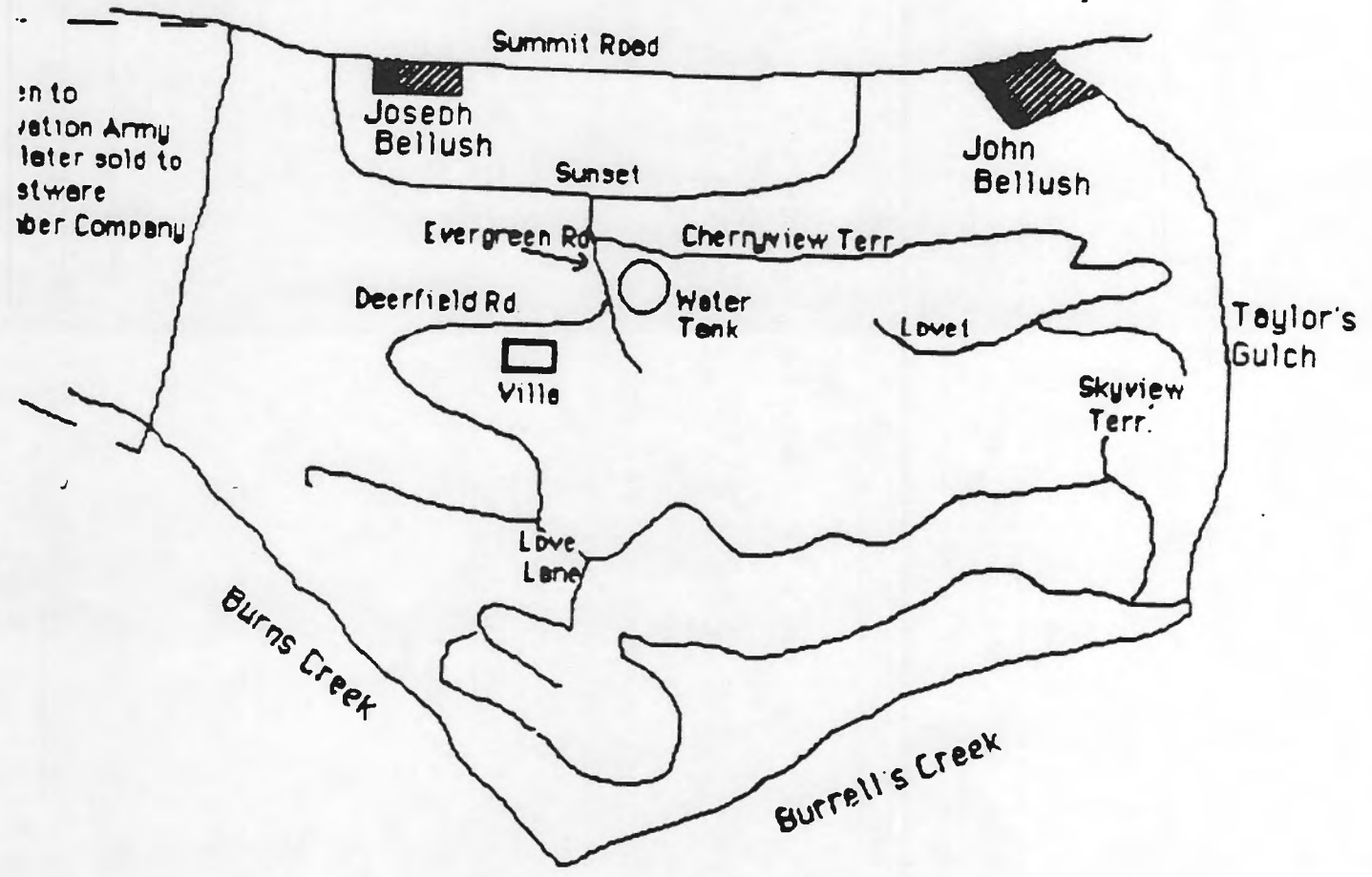
Access to parcels of land, a power source, and water supply were needed. Roads were built strategically placed to access one, two, and three acre parcels of land. What was once Schmitt's reservoir and Aiken's gully had its water supply rerouted to feed a water tank, to service ninety houses,<sup>96</sup> and the Pacific Gas and Electricity Company, which had run electricity lines along the Summit Road, was given a right-of-way to accommodate parcels of land along a road built by the brothers and named Sunset.<sup>97</sup>

Following this, ninety houses were built. The first two were for the brothers and their families. While they were being built the two families lived in the Villa. John Bellush's house was built on the northeastern perimeter of the plot, and Joseph Bellush's on the northwestern perimeter. Mitchell Real Estate Company was contracted to sell the other houses on the plot. In exchange they themselves received a parcel of land,<sup>98</sup> 110 acres of steep unpassable property that was later donated to the Salvation Army, which eventually sold it to Coastware Lumber Company.<sup>99</sup>

In 1958 the brothers moved into their respective homes, and the Villa was sold for \$28,000--a figure lower than the most expensive house on the property--which sold for \$45,000. The brothers continued to maintain their respective properties until 1969.<sup>100</sup>

The Bellush brothers development of the plot changed its whole character. It was now inhabited essentially by commuters to Santa Cruz and cities in the Santa Clara Valley. Their emphasis was their careers, families and home :

Bellush Property



Map 5

Villa Del Monte Development Survey Map  
1958 - Santa Cruz County Records Office



# The Villa Del Monte Development



Map 6.

life, not the land, other than to appreciate its beauty and simplicity. None were dependent on it for sustenance. Individual parcels of land were developed, and homes bought and sold.

The Villa, allotted two acres of land, meanwhile accommodated its new owners, Mr. S. Mead and his wife Carole, but the house was already beginning to show evidence of deterioration. The Bellush's had filled in cracks in the courtyard walls, defacing the frescoes. The bowling alley floor was beginning to rot, water pipes were rusting and delivering orange water, and in the garden, the greenhouse was already in ruins; the pool needed resurfacing and only the remnants of a golf course and tennis court remained. While the Meads resided, they rewired the house for safety ~~and~~ resurfaced the concrete, <sup>AND</sup> unpainted <sup>THE</sup> reflection pool; however, the condition of the water pipes presented an overall problem. As Carole Mead said, "We considered them a health hazard, but while considering having them repaired we realized we could go on and on putting money into the house and the house would simply swallow it up. So many repairs were needed."<sup>101</sup> The condition of the water pipes, the concern of the Meads for their children's health and the costs of repairing the pipes, and other problems in the house eventually led to the Mead's departure from the Villa.

In the meantime; however, in a more positive light, the Villa Del Monte became a family home for the first time (although the Bellush families had resided in the Villa, it

was viewed as a temporary abode). The garden room became a gathering place for festivities; Christmas dinners were held in this room, with a fire blazing in the oval fireplace, a Christmas tree glistening with festive lights and in the corner of the room, a baby grand around which the family (mother, father and three children) would gather for Christmas carols. In the master bedroom suite a baby was born; the central dressing room became a nursery. Next door the middle suite became the Mead's youngest daughter's rooms, and Schmitt's maid's room, the first bedroom to the left of the entry gate, became their teenage daughter's room. For a short time (one year) the house heard children's voices and baby cries. In 1959 the Meads sold the house to Louis Barbieri.<sup>102</sup>

The deteriorating condition of the house by this action was hastened. The new owners ransacked the house, used the wood from the walls as kindling, let flood water stand in the cellar, and allowed fires in the hearth to blacken ceilings, floors and walls. According to Robert Mitchell, the real estate agent who facilitated the sale of property to them, they were:

A bad lot; Barbieri was always coming up with new ideas for making a fortune; none ever realistic. They brought in bulldozers for some bizarre money-making schemes, bulldozed the southern border of the property--leveled it for something--changed the driveway approach from a curved western approach to the eastern direct approach (refer to Map 4). Many people in the area complained about that; they felt that the curved drive was the house's best feature.<sup>103</sup>

Enrico Clementi, Villa Del Monte's next owner, was not

as unappreciative of the house's beauty and charm. In 1960 he purchased the property from Barbieri and within a short time was renovating it, putting an estimated \$35,000 into the house--more than its estimated worth. Termites had eaten through the walls, ceiling and floors. All had to be replaced, repaired or removed. The garden-room had been damaged beyond repair; it had to be demolished. The biggest job was the replacing of the house's foundation. Clementi hired contractors who joiced the house up on stilts, removed all the wood and old foundation, and laid a new concrete foundation. In the process the bowling alley's wooden floor was removed and replaced with concrete, and shortly afterwards a concrete patio laid where the garden room had been. Other changes or renovations: new roofing along the passage between the pillars and external walls in the courtyard, a new brick courtyard floor, pool resurfacing, installation of an electricity line connecting with P.G.& E. at Sunset, and external resurfacing of walls.<sup>104</sup>

Despite the loss of the garden room and "original" bowling alley, the house, with a new face lift of a water-proof stucco mix and freshly manicured gardens, regained a certain amount of its charm. Occasionally, Mr. Clementi, a Stanford physicist and Pulitzer Prize winner, would have to travel for his employer, I.B.M. Before one trip he decided to rent the house, leaving the transaction and the appointment of a suitable tenant up to Mr. Edward Mitchell. Mr. Mitchell received a telephone call from a "famous" psychic requesting to see the house. Mr. Mitchell contacted

Mr. Clementi and was told, "Bring him over, pretend I'm not here." Mr. Mitchell greeted the psychic, who drove up in a long black limousine, accompanied by a big black bodyguard, and took the gentleman--wearing a long, black, flowing cloak and a waxed moustache--over to the Villa. Mr. Clementi opened the door, took one look at the psychic, placed his fingers over his nose, and shooed him away. He could not stand the psychic's perfumed oils or fragrance. The Villa was eventually rented to a couple, Bill and Lisa Winkleman. After their tenancy, Clementi often leased the property to individuals during his absence.<sup>105</sup>

He continued to own the villa until marital problems necessitated the selling of the house. He sold it in 1973 to a gentleman and his wife, Donald and Fay Cupp.<sup>106</sup>

The Cupps did not stay long at the Villa, making few changes, possibly adding wooden storm doors to the entry porch.<sup>107</sup> In 1976 they sold the house to its present owners, Harold M. Lee and Gary Blozer.<sup>108</sup>

The records and legends of the Villa, and the 365 acres that was once its estate, end here with Harold Lee residing in the house hoping to maintain and/or improve the "Villa", as it is affectionately nicknamed.

Over the course of 132 years the property has evolved from its natural state, with three owners--Martina, Hihn, and Burrell--to a modest retirement farm for Aiken, to--by all accounts--a magnificent kingdom and retreat house for one Clarence E. Schmitt.

Now, in 1986, it has become a commuter's outpost, housing many. Their houses nestled in the hillsides, with ample acreage shrubbery maintain an illusionary image of country isolation and privacy. What after another 100-132 years in the year 2118 will the records show?!!

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 Soquel Augmentation Map, 1880-81; Library, University of California, Santa Cruz (hereafter abbreviated as U.C.S.C.).
- 2 Highland Map, 1912; Library U.C.S.C.
- 3 Robert Glass Cleland. From Wilderness to Empire: A History of California 1544-1900. New York: A. Knopf, 1944, p.80.
- 4 John V. Young. Ghost Towns of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Santa Cruz: Paper Vision Press, 1979, p.53.
- 5 Soquel Augmentation Map 1880-81.
- 6 A. Hoover. Historical Spots in California (3rd Edition). Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1952, p.32.
- 7 Young, Ghost Towns, p.54.
- 8 Births/Deaths V.2 Santa Cruz County Records Office (hereinafter abbreviated as S.C.C.R.O.).
- 9 Young, Ghost Towns, p.52.
- 10 Ibid., p.55; "Rowland Scrapbook," p.402, U.C.S.C. Special Collection Room; Deed Index, 1867 S.C.C.R.O.
- 11 Young, Ghost Towns, p.51.
- 12 "Rowland Scrapbook," U.C.S.C. Special Collection Room, p.402.
- 13 J.E. Addicott. Grandad's Pioneer Stories. Los Gatos: Los Gatos Printing Company, 1953, p.40.
- 14 Clarissa Burrell to relatives in Mass, "Burrell Letters," U.C.S.C. Special Collection Room.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 George G. Bruntz. History of Los Gatos. Fresno: Valley Publishers, 1971, p.25.
- 17 "Burrell Letters".
- 18 Library Collection: History Notes. Records of the Department of State, Sacramento; "County Buys Old Toll Road for \$5,000," Los Gatos Mail News, June 30, 1949, p.2.
- 19 Young, Ghost Towns, p.51.
- 20 "Santa Cruz Mountains for Recreation." Los Gatos

Mail News, June 30, 1949, p.2.

- 21 Births/Deaths, V.1, S.C.C.R.O.
- 22 Young, p.57; Soquel Augmentation Map 1880-81; Highland Map 1912, U.C.S.C.; Deed Index 1865-75, S.C.C.R.O.
- 23 Births/Deaths, V.1, S.C.C.R.O.
- 24 Ibid., V.2.
- 25 Anonymous, "Pioneer Journal," Black Binder, Los Gatos Memorial Library.
- 26 Young, Ghost Towns, p.88; Deed Indexes, 1863 through 1904, S.C.C.R.O., show innumerable property transferrals and investments.
- 27 Hoover, p.87.
- 28 Property Deed, October 11, 1873, V.15, p.803, ✓  
S.C.C.R.O.
- 29 Ibid, June 14, 1875, V.1, p.532, April 14, 1876,  
n.d.
- 30 Ibid, June 28, 1883, V.37, p.258. ✓
- 31 Ibid, June 6, 1877, V.4, p.276.
- 32 Ibid, November 3, 1881, V.15, pp.130-131.
- 33 Ibid, June 28, 1918, V.284, p.294, refers to sale. ✓  
*\* Aiken -> Schmitt*
- 34 "Burrell Letters".
- 35 Refer to Hihn to Aiken Deed, Nov. 3, 1881, V.15, pp. 130-131, and Schmitt to Bellush Deed, March 17, 1957, V.1125, pp.50-62. Hihn to Aiken deed mentions Hihn selling to Aiken to fulfill "some" obligation to a gentleman named Storey on April 14, 1876; Schmitt to Bellush deed shows on this day Hihn sold property to DeFour.
- 36 The Public Relations Department, South Pacific Transportation Company, in a letter dated October 1883.
- 37 Both the Aiken to Schmitt deed (June 28, 1918, V.284, p.29) and Schmitt to Bellush deed (March 17, 1957, V.1125, pp.50-62) refer to property transfers between Hall and Aiken, DeFour and Aiken, and Taylor and Akin. The Soquel Augmentation Map 1880-81, and other undated, author unknown maps (U.C.S.C.) confirm Aiken bought the plot's total acreage.
- 38 Property Deed, August 1, 1904, V.155, p.453. ✓



S.C.C.R.O.

- 39 "Journal of a Mountain Pioneer," in the possession of J. Chase, Santa Cruz, Read October 28, 1986, n.p.n.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Young, Ghost Towns, p.31.
- 42 Bruntz, History of Los Gatos, p.27.
- 43 Ibid., p.23.
- 44 "Mountain Pioneer Journal," n.p.n.
- 45 Bruntz, History of Los Gatos, pp.36-38.
- 46 Interview with Robert Taylor, son of Aiken's neighbor William Taylor. Los Gatos, October 28, 1986; "Santa Cruz Mountains for Recreation," Los Gatos Mail News, June 30, 1949, p.2.
- 47 Highland Map 1912 (U.C.S.C.).
- 48 Bruce MacGregor. South Pacific Coast. Berkeley: North Books, 1968, p.25.
- 49 Ibid, p.26.
- 50 Dora Rankin. "As It Was." Los Gatos Times Observer, November 8, 1965.
- 51 Addicott, Grandad's Pioneer Stories, p.63.
- 52 "Pioneer Journal", Black Binder, Los Gatos Memorial Library.
- 53 "Excursion Picnics," Historical news-clippings, Los Gatos Memorial Library, Book 34b, p.41.
- 54 Leonard Pitt. We Americans: A Topical History of the United States. Glenview: Scott Foresman & Company, 1976, p.191.
- 55 "Santa Cruz Mountain, Famous for Recreation." Los Gatos Mail News, June 30, 1949.
- 56 Addicott, Grandad's Pioneer Stories, p.65.
- 57 Ibid., p.62.
- 58 Soquel Augmentation Map 1880-81 shows Aiken as the owner of all the plot's acreage. Interview with R. Taylor confirmed Aiken's ownership through the turn of the century. Aiken's heirs sold the plot to Schmitt, June 28, 1918. V. 25, X

pp.50-62, S.C.C.R.O.

59 Property Deed, June 28, 1918, V.1125, pp.50-62.  
S.C.C.R.O.

60 Interview with Robert Oliver, Schmitt's stepson,  
November 2, 1986, Saratoga.

61 Ibid. "Rowland Scrapbook," U.C.S.C. Special  
Collection.

62 Robert Oliver interview.

63 Ibid.

64 Interview with Robert Walters, Schmitt's foreman from  
1942 through 1957, Los Gatos, October 7, 1986; telephone  
interview with Carole Mead, 1958 Villa resident, November  
30, 1986.

65 Ibid.

66 R. Oliver interview.

67 Walters interview; Public Relations, General  
Telephone Co.

68 Public Relations, General Telephone Co.

69 Ibid.

70 Walters interview.

71 Ibid; Mead interview.

72 Ibid.

73 Property Deed January 14, 1919, V. 288, p.47. ✓  
S.C.C.R.O.

74 Walters interview.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

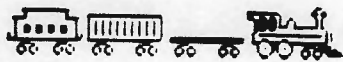
78 Walters and Oliver interviews.

79 Oliver interview.

80 Walters interview.

81 Ibid.

- 82 Ibid.
- 83 Ibid.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Taylor interview.
- 87 Walters and Taylor interviews.
- 88 S.C.C.R.O., Property Deed, April 24, 1953, V.911, ✓  
p.322.
- 89 Ibid, February 16, 1954, V.954, p.514.
- 90 Ibid, Official Records, V.374, pp.487-488.
- 91 Ibid, Property Deed, March 19, 1957, V.1125, pp.50-  
58.
- 92 Ibid, Power of Attorney, August, 1958. Mary and  
Joseph Bellush, 14, Troy Road, Whippany, Township of  
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Gatos, California.
- 93 Ibid, Property Deeds, September 12, 1958, V.1205,  
p.14, V.1237, p.223, V.1211, p.561.
- 94 Walters interview.
- 95 Interview with Edward Mitchell, November 2, 1986, Los  
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Development.
- 96 Right of Way Deed, July 3, 1958, V.1192, p.466.  
S.C.C.R.O.
- 97 Ibid, Property Deed, V.1212, p.515.
- 98 Mitchell interview.
- 99 Ibid.
- 100 Ibid.
- 101 Interview with Mrs. Mead, November 2, 1986,  
telephone.
- 102 Ibid.
- 103 Mitchell interview.



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